

# BUILDING Against the odds

## An In Depth Study of Nehemiah

Lesson Title: Making a Covenant

Date: July 29, 2015

Scripture: Nehemiah 10:1-39

At the end of Nehemiah chapter 9, the people had come to a place of decision, and now, collectively, the nation was going to do something about it by entering into a covenant. Review: what is a covenant? What was the covenant going to accomplish?

### **Roster of those who signed the covenant**

*Nehemiah and the priests signed the covenant*

**Verses 1-8: Now those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these were the priests.**

**WORD STUDY:** In Nehemiah 9:38, the phrase “we make a sure covenant, and write it;” meant that they were planning to honor their word. In the Hebrew, to make a covenant literally means “to cut a covenant”; covenants were not made in the ancient world, they were cut - because almost always an animal was sacrificed as part of the covenant. A covenant always cost something, and our point of decision will cost us something - comfort, ease, relationships, etc. and some of the passing pleasures of this world. Count the cost to see if it’s worth it!

- a. There’s a reason for these names to be mentioned - It was wonderful for the nation as a whole to feel that something had to be done about the sin problem among them. This feeling was all meaningless unless people actually came forth to say we will do something about this. Here are the leaders (84 in all) willing to put their name on the line for the covenant before God. [We could insert a whole lesson here about hypocrites in the church and “*christians*” (and I use it lightly with a lowercase c) who claim to be part of the family of God but do nothing to back up their words.]

### **WHAT COVENANTS CAN YOU THINK OF THAT GOD HAS GIVEN IN THE BIBLE?**

- b. These people in Nehemiah’s day knew what covenants were all about, and how important they were to God. They remembered God made a covenant with Abraham, promising that both a nation and the Messiah would descend from him; God made a covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel when He gave them the law at Mount Sinai; God made a covenant with King David, promising the Messiah would come from his family. But the greatest covenant, the New Covenant instituted by the Messiah, was yet to come.

**Verses 9-13 list the Levites who signed the covenant, and verses 14-27 list the civic leaders who signed the covenant.**

There were eighty-four men who were the first to sign the covenant. This would be similar to the senate all agreeing on a piece of legislation and passing it without argument or discussion. This again is another amazing example of how God can use people and cause them to come together and accomplish goals!

### **The terms of the covenant**

*The making of the covenant with God.*

**Verses 28 and 29: And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;**

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In addition to the priests, Levites, and civic leaders, the remainder of all that understood the concept of the covenant signed their names. Nehemiah called it a curse and an oath. **Why do you think he called it both?**

In making the covenant, they agreed to accept a curse from God if they did not obey His law. They accepted the curse as a form of His correction, to bring them back to obedience. Many of us have done a similar thing. We probably didn't pray "God, curse me if I disobey you", but many of us have prayed, Lord, whatever it takes I want to follow you. Whatever it takes I want to be your man. That is essentially praying the same thing, and that is a good prayer. Verse 29 says they "clave" to their brethren. This meant to be strong, fasten, fortify, lean, mend, etc. They made this covenant publicly; even though it wasn't necessary in the eyes of God, but it was also important that other people be witness to the covenant. A public covenant meant accountability. Think of when you got saved – you wanted to tell everyone around you. You want them to pray for your strength, encourage you, and answer questions when you need advice. When you make an announcement claiming that your life has been completely changed and that your actions/behaviors will be different, it causes people to watch. Most times, people will watch you simply to see you fail, but others genuinely want to be there for you. They will help you stick to it when things get tough and you want to do anything but keep going. They were going to hold one another to this covenant because they were all in it together.

### **Verse 30: And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:**

This promise was addressed to parents. This is because in that day, parents made the marriage decisions, not the people getting married. If this covenant were to be repeated today, it wouldn't be focused towards the parents, but towards the individuals who wanted to get married. When they said "we would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land:" This preserved the important principle that a follower of God should only marry another similarly committed follower of God. It is obvious by experience and observation that it is important to carefully and prayerfully choose your spouse.

- a. If one is not now married, it is important for them to make the same kind of covenant. If one has given their life to serving Jesus Christ, there will be difficulty if they marry someone who has given their life to something else. If one is in that situation now, God can do great things, but one should never knowingly choose to be in that place from the beginning.
- b. The whole idea of marriage is closely connected to the idea of covenant. Malachi 2:14 says, **"Yet she is your companion, and your wife by covenant."** Marriage is a covenant, between the husband and wife, between them, all family and witnesses, but most importantly, between them and God. When we understand marriage as a covenant, we have something to bond us together that is stronger than society's expectations, more constant than romantic love, and more certain than happy times - we have a covenant.

### **Verse 31: And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.**

Under the Old Testament law, God said that no one could buy or sell anything on the Sabbath day. These citizens of Jerusalem had been breaking this law, and now they had made a covenant to God to obey it. The motive for breaking this law was clear. They could make more money selling on seven days of the week instead of six days. This was a covenant to only make money in ways that were obedient and glorifying to God.

**Verses 32-39: Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law: And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD: Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the**

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house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God: And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

1. To exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God:
  - a. They laid down a yearly tax to support the workings of the temple. They required people to bring wood to the temple on a rotating basis. They committed themselves to obey the command to bring the firstborn and the firstfruits, and the tithe (ten percent of the produce of their land) unto the house of God.
  - b. They simply did two things. First, they agreed to give as God had commanded (the firstborn, firstfruits, and the tithe). Second, they agreed to give as the special need required (the one-third of a shekel tax and the wood).
  - c. Firstborn and firstfruits were risky ways to give, because your land might not yield much more produce, and your cow or ewe might not give birth again - yet the first still belonged to God, and was given to the priests. God promised to bless this giving of the firstfruits and firstborn in faith in Proverbs 3:9-10: **Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.**
2. We will not neglect the house of our God:
  - a. If before they covenanted to make money only in ways that would glorify God, here they covenant to spend their money in ways that glorify God - and beginning it all with giving unto the Lord. Not so much for the sake of those we give to, but because giving sets our heart right about material things. God Himself is the greatest giver. If you hold on to money so tightly that you will not be a giver, than you have revealed where your heart is when it comes to money.
  - b. The New Testament speaks with great clarity on the principle of giving; that giving should be regular, planned, proportional, and private (1 Corinthians 16:1-4 *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me."*); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9:7-8 *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:"*).
  - c. If you are reluctant to be a giver as the Bible says you should, simply talk to those who are. Ask them if it has been a blessing or a curse in their life to give as God says to. God promises He will never owe us anything, and we cannot out-give God - though the return is often far better than dollars and cents.